

most sacred and foundational right of our Republic and allows us to come together. History will not look kindly on our inaction.

Two days ago we honored the memory of Dr. King and Coretta Scott King with a Congressional Gold Medal. What better way to honor their legacy than to come together and strengthen the rights they fought so hard to secure for every American?

Voting is fundamental, and ensuring that every American has the right to vote is at the core of what makes our democracy vibrant.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to come together and to find a way forward for us to put voting rights first and to restore the important legacy of June 19 from across so many incidents in so many years and to move us forward on a positive path. Thank you.

Mr. President, could I ask my colleague's indulgence for one last 2-minute speech?

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I was to be recognized before, but I will be glad to, but would like the 15 minutes or so I was allowed to have even though it may back up after me.

So, Mr. President, I would ask unanimous consent that Senator COONS be allowed an additional 2 minutes and I be allowed 15 minutes thereafter.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. COONS. I object, and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMBASSADORIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, when we send American Ambassadors to nearly every country around the world, we are able to strengthen democracy and protect our national security. Ambassadors are voices for American values and the interests we share with other nations. Simply put, they are critical to promoting our foreign policy, our economic and security interests, and our leadership in the world. Yet when—because of partisan politics and gridlock at home—we fail to confirm ambassadors, we send a dangerous message about our lack of interest in the world and our lack of interest to diplomacy.

I have the privilege of chairing the African Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Through my work as chair, as well as time I spent earlier in my life in Africa, I have seen up close both the incredible opportunities in the continent of Africa as well as the stark challenges.

For instance, today, this decade, 7 of the 10 fastest growing economies in the world are in Africa. Yet right now 1 in 5 American embassies of the 54 countries on that continent lacks a confirmed ambassador. Africa faces serious security challenges. Boko Haram in Nigeria, which has recently kidnapped hundreds of girls and burned down churches and schools is just one example. Yet as the countries bordering that troubled area of Nigeria try to coordinate a response to ensure that conflict doesn't spill over borders, we lack confirmed ambassadors in the adjacent nations of Niger and Cameroon.

In Namibia, where we also don't have a confirmed ambassador, the United States is dedicating \$50 million to combat HIV and Aids. We need an ambassador to oversee those funds and make sure they are appropriately used.

I will briefly review some of the numbers and facts. Our nominees to the countries of Namibia, Cameroon, and Niger have waited for a vote for 330 days—almost a year. Our nominee to Sierra Leone has waited 352 days, our nominee to Mauritania has waited 289 days, and our nominee to Gabon has waited 287 days.

In the long absence of ambassadors, professional career Foreign Service officers, capable and competent Deputy Chiefs of Mission assume this role on an interim basis. I am deeply concerned that with the August turnover for Foreign Service officers quickly approaching, many of our embassies will also be left without a DCM at the helm.

This is inexcusable. It hurts our economy, our national security, and our leadership to leave these posts unfilled and the ambassadorial nominees unconfirmed for so long.

I have great hope for Africa's future. Across the continent there are emerging democracies, growing economies, and although there are some security challenges, I am optimistic we can meet them in partnership with Africa's leaders.

When we fail to send career public servants to serve as our ambassadors, we send the message that we are not serious about these challenges and are not willing to invest in these partnerships.

I urge my colleagues to work together across the aisle to devote ourselves to getting our ambassadorial nominees to Africa confirmed. This transcends partisanship, and it is a task we should turn to promptly.

I thank the Presiding Officer and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I wish to thank the Senator from Alabama for allowing me to go ahead of him in cue.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, we say that America is a nation of immigrants, and, of course, that is true. There is no other country in the world

for which immigration is so central to its history and its identity. Let's take a moment to reflect on what that really means.

Here is a photo. I am afraid it is not a very good quality. I took it myself. It is a photo that I took at a naturalization ceremony held for Active Duty servicemembers in Fort Carson, CO. The 13 soldiers and spouses who became U.S. citizens on that day represented 11 different countries of origin even though they are wearing our uniform.

They came from all over the world: Colombia, Haiti, Malaysia, Mexico, Nicaragua, China, the Philippines, South Korea, Togo, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. They all came for this pursuit of the American dream, and they all came to serve this country. They are going to be the people who help us determine our future.

The same is true with the refugees fleeing persecution from around the world. The parents seeking opportunity for their children and those stepping forward to serve and sacrifice for our shared values have made this country the America we love. But our existing immigration policies do not reflect this history or the values that shaped it. Instead, it is a mess of unintended consequences that hurts our businesses, rips families apart, and keeps us at a competitive disadvantage with the rest of the world.

Tomorrow marks 365 days—1 year—since the Senate acted to fix these problems and passed bipartisan immigration reform. Yet here we are still waiting for the House of Representatives to do the same. The House's inaction is costing our Nation. It has cost us, among other things, \$13.4 billion in lost revenue in this last year alone. With each additional day that passes, we lose another \$37 million of revenue.

What is most frustrating about this to me is that we agree—on both sides of the aisle—that our current immigration system is broken. We agree that our immigration system is critical for our economy and for our country.

In June of last year we passed a bill in this Chamber with strong bipartisan support. It won the support of a broad coalition of Republicans and Democrats. It also has the support of countless organizations, from migrant workers to farmers and ranchers, from law enforcement agencies to the faith community, Latino leaders across this country, and the Chamber of Commerce to labor unions.

Often I tell those who despair about the lack of leadership in Congress that there is a model we can learn from, and it is the bipartisan work that was done on this bill. I cannot say enough about the Republican Members of the Gang of 8 who negotiated a bill over seven or eight months, knowing what the base of their party might say about the fact that they were in that room but still willing to do it because it was right to do for their country and it was right to do for their party—in that order.

In this job I have had the opportunity to meet with a diverse cross section of